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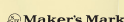
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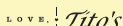
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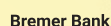
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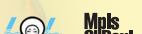
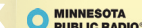
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CONTENTS

LAVENDER

ISSUE 700 March 24-April 6, 2022

Minnesota Travel

- 16 Welcome to Minneapo-swish
- 18 Getaway Cabins
- 20 A Joyful Treasure Hunt
- 24 Capturing the Spirit of Superior



12

ON THE COVER

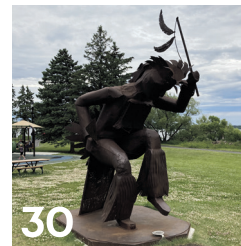
Kentö. Photographer: The Vtmns. Wardrobe: Paolo Raymundo



24



28



30

24: Photo by Beverly Cedar, 28: Photo courtesy of CPT Ashley Birdsall, 30: Photo by Randy Stern

OUR LAVENDER

- 8 From the Editor
- 9 A Word in Edgewise
- 10 From A to Zee

OUR SCENE

- 12 Out Back: Kentö

OUR LIVES

- 28 MN National Guard

OUR RESOURCES

- 32 Community Connection
- 33 The Network

OUR HOMES

- 30 Our Rides

OUR VOICES

- 34 Skirting the Issues

24

Duluth Harbor North Pier Light Photo by Beverly Cedar



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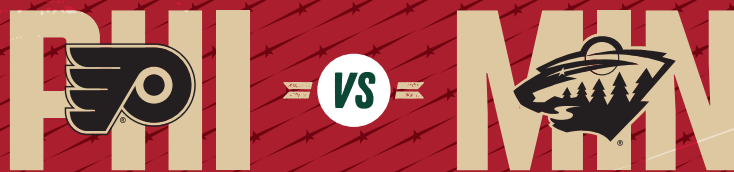
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From Our State To Yours

BY RANDY STERN | PHOTO BY RANDY STERN

We live in a wonderful region of this country.

You may argue one way or another. You may point out that it gets too cold in the winter, too hot in the summer. You can also complain about the mosquitos that make it a challenge when the air temperature is right – for them.

However, we always find some form of serendipity in our land. There are times when we often find ourselves in the vacuum created by our home. Always looking around to find a way to explore what is beyond our community's "walls." For some of us, our neighborhood is our domain. Traveling beyond it is a treat to behold every time you leave the familiar confines of home.

As a community, we do a lot of traveling. I am not talking about the snowbird migration to the Sun Belt. Or, that cruise in the Caribbean or across the ocean somewhere.

We seek other places within the state line – and, a bit beyond it.

Consider our magazine as your guide to exploring more of our territory. That means going outdoors! From the Boundary Waters to the Minnesota River Valley, we have plenty of places to get away from our humble routines. You may never know what you'll find in travels.

Let's not forget that the Target Center plays host the NCAA Division I Women's Final Four. The top four women's basketball programs in the country will converge for the final two rounds of tournament play to be crowned "National Champion."



One thing to think about the Twin Cities: We are a hub. You come to us for the activities in town, the shopping, the sports, and the culture. Then, you can spread out to all corners of the region for the nature and the calm.

As the air starts warming up, it is time to explore what this region has to offer. Do yourselves a favor and get out there! Don't forget to be prepared to stay safe wherever you go! ■

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Should We Have Stopped at Erectus?

BY E.B. BOATNER

We are very slightly changed From the Semi-apes who ranged

India's Prehistoric clay; He that drew the longest bow

Ran his brother down, you know As we run men down to-day.

(R. Kipling, "A General Summary" circa 1894)

E.O. Wilson's *The Social Conquest of Earth* (2012) is a fascinating, enlightening, sobering read. Wilson explores the sources of human socialization, creativeness, culture, altruism, eusociality; much more than can be included here, but *Homo sapiens'* irresistible attraction to war over the millennia is of particular interest at this moment in time.

Wilson harks back to *Australopithecus afarensis*, some five to three million years ago, then to the six-million year interim when the chimpanzee-pre-human line split off and today's "we" began to develop on our dogged rise to dominance.. *Homo habilis* emerged, and made the crucial dietary leap to now to regularly consume meat as well as vegetables, who had a larger brain, with physical changes in its folds that later organized language. They were smarter than neighboring hominins and paved the way for *Homo erectus* who possessed a yet larger brain (though not as large as ours. *Erectus* crafted stone

tools and could maintain controlled fire at their campsites. *Erectus* travelled, dispersing from Africa, some as far as northern China, others south to tropical Java—missing only Australia, the New World and some bits in the Pacific. They multiplied; and evolved.

Wilson foreshadows darkly, "*Homo sapiens* had arrived and its social conquest of the Earth was imminent ... The origin of modern humanity was a stroke of luck—good for our species for a while, bad for the rest of life forever."

A problem, of course, was that we, the *Homo saps*, were then all (mostly) had those big brains, plus the necessary dentition to eat the cooked meat we needed for the amounts of protein needed for energy to slay those "others" in their way and the group cooperation to act. Not to be ignored is what Wilson termed "social intelligence," essentially the ability to "read" those in one's group to form alliances, manipulate one's fellows, raise—and maintain—one's hierarchical position in the clan. (The birth of politics)

In the chapter "War as Humanity's Hereditary Curse," Wilson gives several historic examples then cautions, "It should not be thought that war, often accompanied by genocide, is a cultural artifact of the growing pains of our species' maturation. Wars and genocide have been

universal and eternal, respecting no particular time or culture."

Populations grow, and *Homo sapiens* do not curb our instincts to claim new territory and to consume without consideration. Humans today still hunger to belong to a group, and to defend that group from "outsiders," going so far as to dehumanize any "other" as a valid reason to eradicate them.

Wilson quotes William James's 1906 antiwar essay: "History is a bath of blood" ... "Showing war's irrationality and the horror is of no effect ... The horrors make the fascination. War is the *strong* life; it is life *in extremis*; war taxes are the only ones men never hesitate to pay, as the budgets of all nations show us."

Kipling (whose only son, John, yet unborn, would die at 18 in the Great War), concluded his poem:

Ere they hewed the Sphinx's visage Favouritism governed kissage

Even as it does in this age.

Thus the artless songs I sing Do not deal with anything

New or never said before. As it was in the beginning Is to-day official sinning,

And shall be for evermore. ■



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SCAN ME



Black History Month 2022 was a wash at best....

BY ZAYLORE STOUT

For the first time in my lifetime, I feel the Black community has received more bad news this Black History Month than good news. Hear me out...

More than 20 Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) received bomb threats at the start of Black History Month. As the month rolled along those bomb threats kept rolling in — including a threat to Howard University on Valentine's Day. This was a hard and painful reminder of the past when on September 15, 1963, the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, was bombed by Klu Klux Klan (KKK) members, killing four young girls and injuring 20 other people. Say their names: Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, and Carole Robertson (all age 14), and Denise McNair (age 11). Message to the community: You are still not welcome here and we will make sure you remember that!

Former Brooklyn Center Officer Kim Potter was sentenced for the killing of Black motorist Daunte Wright. The Minnesota sentencing guidelines for a first-degree manslaughter charge/conviction carries a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison and/or a \$30,000 fine and a presumptive sentence of six to eight-and-a-half years. The judge cited the difficult job that police face and the remorse Potter exhibited as

justification for giving Potter such a light sentence. She received only a two-years prison sentence. The message to the community: The tears of a White police officer trumps the tears of the grieving mother, father, and family of a slain young Black man.

The Florida HB 7 bill passed the state house by a vote of 74 to 41. This bill would implement Governor Ron DeSantis's "Stop WOKE" initiative which is tasked with stopping the teaching of critical race theory in K-12 schools (which isn't happening anyway). The bill would provide parents and employees a mechanism to bring legal action if subjected to so-called "woke" ideology, often referring to conversations about race or sexism.

Republicans who favor the bill argued that children should be taught history however they should not be made to feel guilt, embarrassment, or ashamed because of an act that they did not commit. I find it interesting that Republicans assume these White students, when looking at historical wrongs, would take the same of the oppressors as opposed to the side of those being opposed. Message to the community: Our feelings are more important than the tangible effects systemic racism has had on your lives.

Although the three White men who killed Ahmaud Arbery were

found guilty on all counts in their recent federal hate crimes trial it was not without controversy. Family members of Arbery had to beg and plead that the judge reject the plead deal prosecutors were pushing for which would have allowed the McMichaels to serve time in federal prison, which is generally regarded as having both better and safer conditions as compared to state prisons. Let's not forget, had it not been for the continued and sustain protests, pressure, and public outcry from the broader community the original state criminal charges would never have been brought forward. Message to the community: Your lives aren't as valued, and your voice isn't as important if it's not partnered with that of a White ally.

But of course, there was good news for the Black community this Black History Month. President Biden formally announced the nomination of Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to the United States Supreme Court, setting in motion a historic confirmation of the first Black woman on the highest court in the land.

In a landmark decision, a Minnesota federal jury found the three former Minneapolis police officers involved in the murder of George Floyd guilty of depriving him of his civil rights when they helped with the restraint that led to his death. Specifically, the jury found the officers, collectively, deprived Floyd of his right to medical care, and failed to intervene as the senior officer knelt on Floyd's neck.

Black history was also made at the 2022 Winter Olympics, where Erin Jackson became the first Black woman to win a solo medal in speed skating in the 500m event. Olympian Elana Meyers Taylor made history

by winning silver in the first ever women's monobob event.

Niecy Nash and her wife, singer Jessica Betts, made Black herstory when the couple were the first same-sex couple featured on the cover of the *Essence* magazine. *Note: For those not in the know, Essence is a staple within the Black community and is in virtually every Black home.*

You may think that based on this short list provided here that the scales seem pretty even. Well progress can only happen when you are not simultaneously taking steps back. Ever since the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed into law, due to the advocacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and countless other civil rights activists, the Republican party has been chipping away at the right to vote. It was recently reported that Yolanda Renee King, the only granddaughter of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King who is now 13 years old, has less access to vote than when her grandfather did. Yet, once Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson's nomination was reported the U.S. Senate seems to have forgotten about this important legal issue that disproportionately impacts all People of Color (POC) and will have a direct effect on the outcome of the forthcoming midterm election.

Every parent, community, generation wants those following in their footsteps to have a more open, accepting, and prosperous society. When Yolanda Renee King has less access to vote than her grandfather Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. we need to start doubling up on progress in order to just tread water. ■

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OUT BACK

Singer Kentō's New LP Takes Music Lovers Down Under

BY TERRANCE GRIEP | PHOTOGRAPHER: THE VTMNS | WARDROBE: PAOLO RAYMUNDO

It's the same old song and dance: a kid's born in northern Maine to a Japanese/French father and a Brazilian/French mother, reared in the United States, Brazil, and Japan, learning five languages along the way. Fitting in is no easy task for the kid who bounces around the world like a bad check, and fitting in becomes even more difficult when the kid reaches his teens—that's when rainbows come into his life in a big way: the kid figures out that he's a member of the LGBTQ+ community, and the kid finds himself living on the autism spectrum, two statuses he would eventually call his superpower.



Eventually.

Those rainbow refrains make things hard, sure, but they turn out to be comparative kids' stuff: before he's fully grown, the kid is orphaned, and when adulthood finally greets him, it does so with a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, doo-wop, doo-wop, doo-wop-bop.

Hey—no one said it was a *good* same old song and dance.

This is the story of Kentō, give or take a Charles Dickens novel-singer, songwriter, synth-pop arteest, producer, director of music videos, beater of odds, observer of the human condition...and inveterate, unapologetic lover of music.

YANG TO THE YIN

During all the swirling uncertainty of his childhood, all that churning chaos of his pubescence, the one thing that the future Kentō could always depend on was his greatest love, his love of music. No matter what challenge life hurled at the kid, music's succor was always there for him...even before he needed to be succored. At the precociously-adorbs, downright-Mozart-esque age of six, the kid began performing and recording prefab tunes wherever he could, often summoning a Maynard-G.-Krebs-meets-Angus-MacGyver resourcefulness, turning household items into *de facto* instruments.

Kentō's ardor of tempo, meter, and articulation grew as he grew, so much so that he began writing and performing his own songs, influenced by such millennial-retro acts as Duran Duran, Tears for Fears, and Kate Bush. By age fifteen, while residing in the Land

of the Rising Sun, he appeared professionally wherever a musician might get paid, singing and drumming and pianoing in exchange for tiny piles of yen.

Kentō's love of music grew so big, in fact, that he decided it was big enough to risk by turning it into a Real Job. In 2013, the kid recorded and released *Complicated*, his first EP, or Extended Play record—a presentation with more tracks than a single but with less tracks than an album. "It has a clubby, anthemy vibe," the creator observes. That vibe turned the newly christened Kentō into an indie darling.

That's when the cancer came a-callin'. After a gut-wrenching, years-long battle, the young artist gave the disease the vaudeville hook with no return engagement. Although he's been cancer-free for years now, the malady has, in its way, stayed with him—haunted him, even. "Cancer taught me to slow down and smell the flowers, so to speak," he freely admits.

WIZARD OF AUS

That setback didn't make the Kentō any less ambitious or any less determined, though. Kentō focused on the creation and release of an LP, (or Long Play, industry jargon for a full album). He wanted the larger work to expand his audience, sure, but he had another reason for creating it, as well. Toward these ends, he wrote twice as many cuts as such a project might need. He ended up halving that abundance, a winnowing that proved less agonizing than one



might expect. “As I went through the songs, one connected to another when I found a common theme,” Kentö notes. “There are sixteen songs on the LP.”

The album where those dozen-plus-four songs found a home was given the name *Strangers*, taking its title from a then-recent experience. “I was at a party in LA, but I wasn’t at the table, if that makes sense,” he remembers. “I had people on either side of me. I felt like I was hanging out with the cool kids for a minute. Then I looked around and thought, ‘You all know me, but do I really know any of you?’”

The LP not only demonstrates a growth in Kentö’s output, but also a growth in his maturity as a musician. “When I first started out [as a professional], I was going for what was trendy in the moment,” Kentö recalls. “Today, I’m going for a timeless sound, music that won’t seem dated ten years from now.”

Strangers’ first two releases were, respectively, “Silhouette,” a song exploring self-acceptance in the face of derision (and inspired by skater Adam Rippon), and “Pegasus,” an homage to Kentö’s late friend, drag queen Chi Chi DeVayne. These have been followed by *Strangers’* third single, “Australia.” This most-current song has less to do with geography, topography, or zoography than you might initially think—“less,” in fact, to the extent that the song has nothing at all to do with those -phies. Instead, it has everything to do with chronology. And attitude.

“It’s already tomorrow in Australia,” the New York-based artist points out, “so there’s no point in stressing about it. Whatever it has in store, tomorrow has already happened. Do your best, and everything will be okay.” Coming from someone who has lived Kentö’s life, one might do well to listen to this hard-won insight.

SECRET ORIGINS

“Australia” owes its very existence to listening. Kentö was hanging out with his longtime collaborator, fellow synth-pop artist Frankmusik, who

has produced songs by such up-and-comers as Ellie Goulding, Colette Carr, and RuPaul. The producer played several semi-finished tracks, and one in particular resonated. Recounts the artist, “I asked him if I could write on it, and he said, ‘Sure.’”

This was the point at which Kentö’s spectrumy superpowers kicked in. “When I write, I hyper focus obsessively,” the artist says, describing how his autism catalyzes the creative process. “Sometimes, I focus on a feeling. Sometimes, I focus on an image, or even on a single color.” Into this effort the synth-pop artist synthesized his own LGBTQ+ identity and experience. After this synthesis turned into “Australia,” producer and musician presented “the finished song to my distributor, and they loved it,” Kentö reminisces.

It’s the same old song and dance...except that it’s totally different. Where the future Kentö found succor in music, the current Kentö dispenses succor via music. “People write to me every day, from all around the world” the artist reports. “They tell me about how they relate my songs to themselves. They say my songs have made an impact on them, have helped them. It’s interesting, it’s cool.”

Music was always there for Kentö...and now, thanks to “Australia” and its siblings on *Strangers*, Kentö is there for music. Early feedback indicates that the new LP has succeeded in expanding Kentö’s audience... and realized its other purpose, as well. Affirms the artist, “I wanted to make an album that reminded me of why I love music.” ■

“Silhouette,” “Pegasus,” and “Australia” can be accessed via the usual streaming platforms, as well as Kentö’s website:

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photo by sophia hantzes

Welcome to Minneapo-swish

BY HOLLY PETERSON | PHOTOS BY SOPHIA HANTZES

Minnesota and Women's Basketball go together like flannel and work boots. Like chicken and wild rice. Like Lindsay Whalen and winning. You get my point. Whether it's supporting the Minnesota Lynx, the University of Minnesota Golden Gophers, or even our high school teams, love of women's sports runs deep up here in the bold north. With that in mind, it is past time that the Twin Cities got the opportunity to host the Women's Final Four. And you can bet your blue ox that we're going to take full advantage of the opportunity.

THE BASKETBALL

All three games will be played at the Target Center in Downtown Minneapolis. The national semifinals will both take place on Friday, April 1 at 6:00 PM and 8:30 PM. The championship game will be two days later, on April 3 at 5:00 PM.

2022 is a big year for the Women's Final Four. For the first time ever the Women's NCAA tournament includes 68 teams, finally adopting the format the men's league has been using since 2011. Like Nina King, Chair of the NCAA Division/Women's Basketball Committee, says "There are 68 teams that are deserving of a spot in the NCAA Women's Basketball Championship." And who doesn't want more teams, more competition, and more basketball?

The equity doesn't end with the opportunity. Get ready to see the Women's Final Four like you never have before. This year the championship games will be captured by almost forty cameras – a huge upgrade from college basketball's standard five.

"This is something I'm really proud of," says ESPN Coordinating

Producer Pat Lowry. Lowry has made it her mission to make sure that no detail goes unnoticed in these games and is accomplishing that mission with an impressive array of cameras. From the wide-angle perspective of the supercam, which Lowry jokingly describes as "the one that flies around and makes everything look big and important" to the courtside rail-cam to the high speed replay cameras, this tournament will be captured on an extraordinary level.

All of these upgrades translate to an amazing televised experience. If you don't have tickets for every game, why not check out a few at one of our favorite women-owned sports bars? Try The Dubliner in St. Paul or either Como Tap or Cardinal Restaurant and Bar in Minneapolis.

LOCAL SUGGESTIONS

The Twin Cities has a lot to offer outside of basketball.

Minnesota is well known for its Jucy Lucys – a cheeseburger that puts the cheese inside the beef patty instead of on top of it. Most burger joints will have some version of this inverted cheeseburger (my personal favorite is the Blucy at Blue Door Pub), but if you want to try the original check out Matt's Bar or the 5-8 Club. Both establishments insist that they were the first to come up with this greasy delicacy and both are worth a visit. Fair warning: Matt's is cash only.

The Saloon, the Gay 90s, and The Black Hart are some of the best queer nightlife that the Twin Cities has to offer. From drag to karaoke to bingo and burlesque, you are sure to find something that strikes your fancy. One of my most treasured memories is from a night out at the Black Hart when one of the dancers put a Victorian spin on their performance

and spent a solid three minutes coyly showing off their ankles. I have never laughed so hard. Check the schedules of all three venues to see what kind of fun you can expect this weekend.

We are an outdoorsy people – even in the winter months. April either offers up last-minute blizzards or gorgeous spring weather, so we'll split the difference and recommend taking a springtime walk at Minnehaha Falls or renting cross country skis from one of our many outdoor gear shops and hitting the trails at Theodore Wirth Park or Fort Snelling State Park. Of course, there's always the Como Park Conservatory for those who prefer their outdoors to be indoors.

I also recommend a visit to George Floyd Square. This three-block stretch along Chicago Avenue in Minneapolis runs from East 37th to East 39th Street and is marked by three impressive sculptures of raised fists. If you do go to George Floyd Square, please remember that this is a sacred space, built during the 2020 uprising and lovingly maintained since then. You can also find a few powerful murals created by Minnesotan artists and activists in Uptown along Hennepin Avenue and in South Minneapolis around Lake and Minnehaha. Make sure you support some of our favorite Black-owned restaurants as well (www.lavendermagazine.com/our-scene/black-owned-restaurants-in-the-twin-cities).

OFFICIAL EVENTS

There are plenty of official events to check out this weekend. More details can be found on the NCAA website.

Super Saturday Practice – Free – Target Center

April 2 from 1 – 3:15 PM (doors at 12:30 PM)

A unique opportunity to see college basketball practice at its highest level.

Tourney Town – Free – Minneapolis Convention Center

April 1 from 9 AM – 5 PM



photo by sophia hantzes

April 2 from 9 AM – 6 PM

April 3 from 9 AM – 4 PM

Three days of pep rallies, games, mascots, and more. Check out the Beyond the Baseline programming, which features panel discussions, social events, and networking opportunities based around women in sports, leadership, and business.

Party on the Plaza – Free – 1st Avenue in front of Target Center

April 1 from 3 PM – 5:30 PM

April 2 from 12 PM – 4 PM

April 3 from 2 PM – 4:30 PM

An outdoor pregame with food, beverages, music, games, photo opportunities and more.

Minneapolis is incredibly pleased to be hosting the Women's Final Four this year. Come for the basketball. Stay for the Jucy Lucy, the queer scene, the parks, and the activism.

We're glad you're here. ■

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Getaway Cabins

Be Kind, Unwind

BY ANDREW STARK | PHOTOS COURTESY OF GETAWAY



This little getaway couldn't have come at a more welcome time. Pardon the metaphor right off the bat, but the fault line of my life has shifted, creating a new topography, new crests and valleys, what seems like a new world. And, at 39, I finally feel like I'm standing at the precipice of a business-casual adulthood. Hold your breath. Trust fall.

Willow River, MN (as opposed to Willow River State Park, which is in Wisconsin), is a town of about 500 at the wooded asterisk of I-35, County Roads 43 and 61, where the Kettle and Willow Rivers embrace. Things To Do: Squirrel Cage Bar and Motel, Moose Lake State Park, Route 61 Lounge and Bowling, something called the Bear's Den. Nearest Walmart is over 30 miles away, and that's pure poetry.

City life can wear on a person. It's easy to forget who you used to be or who you used to want to be, all that prelapsarian kindergarten zeal up and gone like a frightened cat. The low-level roar of downtown, the white noise of the suburbs. This is the American Dream in action, and sometimes it's tough to wake up.

Getaway was conceptualized for just that purpose: to getaway. Whereas the peopled world expects—nay, demands—largeness, loudness, mandatory participation in the deep-fried riot of consumerism, the mosh pit of self-promotion, Getaway quietly encourages smallness, peace, mindfulness. Once you step inside one of their thoughtfully appointed tiny cabins, you're met with a cell phone lockbox. There is no TV. The whole concept is antithetical to Wi-Fi.

And they welcome dogs (bowls, bags and treats provided), so I'm not traveling alone.

Getaway, a health and wellness hospitality company, was founded by Jon Staff as a result of his own burnout in 2015. Each tiny house was designed with key concepts in mind—free time, slowing down, disconnecting—in an effort to encourage a healthy work/life balance. The outposts are located under two hours from major U.S. cities like Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Seattle, New York and others.

The sky looks like melted plastic. It's cold. The suggestion of animal tracks left by creature so slight they barely break the surface of snow-covered fields. Deer everywhere. Then, at the end of Long Lake Road: Getaway cabins disperse like a neighborhood of minimal-futuristic pods. Each little house has a Scandinavian bent, their windows panes of honeyed light and cedar among all this electric blue. Fire pit/grill provided, with bundles of firewood available on-site for purchase.

This is not a trend. Our concept of lodging has imploded—whereas options for travelers/adventurers were previously limited to, say, hotels/hostels and campgrounds, we can now book anything from treehouses





to castles to houseboats. Humans are curious creatures, and the market has finally caught on.

Punch the door code and enter. First, kitchenette with sink, soap, large and small enamel bowls/plates, cutting board, two-burner stovetop, mini fridge, all the utensils you should need, AM/FM radio, selection of books, deck of cards. This is a study in feng shui, everything neatly in its place, nothing extra, nothing compromised. The small bathroom has a toilet, towels, shower, and a first aid kit.

The highlight of these cabins is, perhaps, the glass wall giving way to views of the forest. It's the closest thing to sitting outside. I recline on the (very comfortable) bed and stare up at the treetops, which disappear into obscurity. Then, I open Jim Harrison's *Brown Dog* for the umpteenth time and crack a beer.

This is a time for reflection. I put on some soft music and relax. My head is empty, a Zen-like balloon. And since I've previously described the workings of my mind as like two dogs fighting, I don't know how to feel. All the static of my life—money, dating, an encyclopedia of past mistakes, the chaos of my youth—starts to feel ephemeral, like the last ribbons of a dying song or the reverb of some passing storm.

Tomorrow I will explore the area. Banning State Park, General Andrew's State Forest, Saint Croix State Park. Nearby Three Twenty and Moose Lake Brewing Companies.

But, tonight, I will unwind, read for a while, drink a few beers. And then I'll sleep like a fallen tree. ■

A Joyful Treasure Hunt

Spring Flower Discoveries in Minnesota State Parks

BY DEBORAH LOCKE, INFORMATION OFFICER MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MINNESOTA DNR

Spring. Even the word sounds energetic.

The season unfolds in layers at Minnesota state parks, giving way to thousands of acres of early spring ephemerals and spring wildflowers. For the price of a daily or annual park pass, Minnesota state park visitors can sample miles of floral eye candy, one of nature's first signs of spring.

So, pull on a hooded sweatshirt, grab a water bottle, call your best friend or make this a solo trip to your nearest state park. As winter leaves, thousands of delicate-looking flowers push through heavy soil, lift their blooms and carpet forest floors. The blooms may look fragile, but they're tough, adjusting for harsh winter growing conditions, and usually blooming close to the ground and out of the wind. We will feature three Minnesota state parks, each with impressive spring wildflower displays.



ITASCA STATE PARK

Connie Cox, interpretive naturalist at Itasca State Park in north central Minnesota, said that the first blooming spring flowers at Itasca are the purple blossomed round-lobed hepatica. Also, the bloodroot blooms with its white flower and scalloped leaves. Later the wild ginger blooms with its heart-shaped leaves, and the Large-flowered Bellwort with its twisted yellow petals. Finally, the large-flowered trillium blooms with its one-foot tall stem.

She said that traditionally, spring wildflower viewing is popular as state residents emerge from winter. Hikers discover the first hepaticas, wild ginger and bloodroot. The spring ephemeral viewing culminates with the blooming of the large-flowered trilliums, an event for which visitors will make a special trip. The most common questions received at the park about spring flowers are: "Are any flowers blooming?" and "Are the trillium blooming?" and finally, "When will the lady-slippers bloom?" (To the last question: June.)

CAMDEN STATE PARK

Camden State Park, located in southwestern Minnesota, features a hardwood valley surrounded by open prairie. Valley wildflowers include white trillium, trout lilies, bloodroot and violets. The prairie, too, comes alive in the spring with pasque flowers and prairie smoke, said Neil Slifka, an area resource specialist out of Owatonna.

Trout lilies are widespread throughout Minnesota state parks except for the western prairie counties, Slifka said. The yellow trout lily with its mottled leaf shaped like a trout is restricted to Minnesota woodlands. Large colonies of lilies grow in hardwood forests, appearing like a blanket at Camden State Park.

Spring ephemerals like trout lilies, the showy lady's slipper (Minnesota's state flower) and trillium are important food sources to early seed spreaders like ants, Slifka said. True to its name, the trillium,





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which grows in small groups, contains three leaves and three petals. Like all spring ephemerals, the flower bloom grows before its leaves, and the entire flower dies by the time nearby trees produce leaves.

NERSTRAND BIG WOODS STATE PARK

Nerstrand Big Woods State Park, located in southeastern Minnesota, contains large patches of trillium that are easily visible from the park's boardwalks. Generally, the park is a poster child for spring ephemerals, Slifka said. The park is known for its sharp-lobed hepatica, and dwarf trout lilies. A short quarter-mile walk from the parking lot will take you down the boardwalk to the Hidden Falls Waterfall, past thick areas of spring ephemerals. At Nerstrand, volunteer "wildflower ambassadors" answer questions from park visitors about spring flowers.

The above begs a question. Why bother to drive to a state park when it's so much easier to run to a garden store and buy a potted blooming plant?

Connie Cox offered an eloquent answer. "I impulsively buy tulips, buttercups and hyacinths that make their way into local stores," Cox explained, "longing to bring some beauty into my home. But my greatest joy is discovering the beauty that nature provides. Each wildflower blooms in its own time. Each has its own special place it likes to grow.

The interesting sizes, shapes, colors, and smells make for an exciting adventure of discovery.

"Getting outside and enjoying the fresh air, trying to find the wildflowers in their natural home not only brings joy," said Cox, "but is still a type of treasure hunt. I find myself exploring new areas around my home, around the forests near me, but also going to new places to see and photograph other spring flowers that don't grow in my area, like pasque flowers, skunk cabbage or Dutchman's breeches. Each grows in a special landscape worth protecting.

"But it really is more than just looking for flowers," Cox explained. "You can also hear the birds that are returning, smell the rich smell of moist soil, or the 'green' smell of emerging vegetation. You can feel the play of warm sunlight or the coolness as a breeze blows across the retreating lake ice. You might spot a pair of swans standing on the ice, waiting for it to melt so they can build their nest. And who knows, you might see the next generation of wildlife that, like spring, is beginning a new life. Be it wildflowers or wildlife, for me, seeing that first blooms of new life is something I remember and can treasure when next winter comes and I once again long for spring and the discovery of the cycle of life." ■

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22-OC05

Capturing the Spirit of Superior

BY LINDA RAINES | PHOTOS BY BEVERLY CEDAR

The Ojibwe name for Lake Superior is *Otchipwe-kitchi-gami*, but one often also sees it spelled as *gichi-gami*, *gitchi-gami* or *kitchi-gami*, depending upon different dialects. No matter what the name, this lake has held a mystique and reverence for people for thousands of years. Its size alone captivates the imagination; its immense depth and the chill of its waters, the ferocity of its autumn storms, the intensity of its ice in the winter – all make it nearly a force of nature on its own; very nearly a living being. The native peoples knew not to underestimate the water they called “the great sea”, and the European immigrants soon learned to respect it as well.

The beauty of the land around Superior, along with the lake itself, calls to the souls of those who feel a connection to it on a cellular and spiritual level. It especially speaks to those who love to capture its beauty and majesty in photography, and one of those people is Beverly Cedar.

Not many people would think of camping along the shores of Superior in the winter! What goes into the preparation for a camping trip when one is looking at snow, wind, and potentially sub-zero temperatures?

Yeah, it's a little crazy! There are definitely a lot of things to consider when planning a winter camping trip when the temps are extreme. The biggest things are letting someone know where I'm going, what clothes to wear, what to eat, choosing camping locations and how to keep my





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camera batteries from getting too cold. Everything is challenging when it's below zero. Things as simple as drinking water are difficult, because everything freezes. So, I bring a portable stove to thaw snow and ice. Eating is also something that I really need to plan ahead for. I need about triple the calories per day in those temps than I would normally consume but trying to cook is not ideal. So, I eat a lot of trail mix, nuts, peanut butter, tortillas, avocados, dehydrated fruit, tofu that I've precooked at home. As far as clothes go, lots of layers are key and mukluks are a must have for me. The main rule that I have when winter camping is to stay outside the entire time. I don't go indoors at all. Once I acclimate to the temps and know that's what I have to deal with, it becomes a lot easier to accept. Even if I pass through a town, I won't go into a restaurant or coffee shop. As soon as I go into a warm place, it makes it incredibly difficult to go back into the cold.

Do you have certain areas up on the North Shore that you feel are better for camping and for finding unique landscapes for your photography?

Yes, I do have a few favorite places. I have a friend that has 20 acres between Duluth and Two Harbors, and do the majority of my camping there. I also camp at a lot of the state parks; I really love Tettegouche, Split Rock and the Finland State Forest for places near the north shore. I also like camping along the lakeshore in random spots. As far as finding

unique landscapes for my photography, I'm always driving around up there and looking for new places. A lot of the places that I go to are not marked on a map or in a guidebook, they're places I've discovered or people have told me about over the years. There are even places in the middle of Duluth that are amazing; Tischer Creek and Lester River are both incredible.

Your nature photography is always stunning. Do you prefer to shoot landscapes while hiking on one of the many trails the state offers, or do you prefer to shoot while kayaking or canoeing?

Thank you! I prefer to shoot while hiking and camping. I bring a waterproof camera with me when I go kayaking, but I never really take any serious photos with it, usually just snapshots of random things. I would love to canoe The Boundary Waters and do some serious photographing there. I've canoed there before, but I didn't have camera gear with me. I really want to get back up there with photography being the main focus. It's such a magical place.

As a person who has a very strong spiritual connection to Lake Superior and the land surrounding it, could you tell our readers what Superior means to you?

That's a tough question! Lake Superior is an incredibly spiritual place for me. I don't think I can really put it into words. Hence my reason for constantly photographing it. I'm always trying to express the beauty and sacredness of it. It's a place that inspires me like no other and brings me great peace of mind. I feel like no matter what I go through in life, I can always go up to Lake Superior and find my balance again. She feels so timeless. I feel the same power and energy coming from her as I did when I sat at her shores as a kid. She is a loving ancestor who is always there for me. I feel incredibly blessed to be able to go and sit with her and talk to her and swim with her. It's so cathartic and healing on every level.

You and your wife, Jen, recently got married on the shores of Lake Superior. Tell me about that, and what it meant to you both to make your commitment official in an area that means so much to both of you.

It was an incredible experience! We eloped at Stoney Point at sunrise on the winter solstice last year. So, we got married in our favorite place on our favorite day. That was really powerful for us. There was a snowstorm and it was cold and beautiful. My wife Jen and I arrived about an hour before sunrise and started a big bonfire next to Lake Superior. We had the fire, fresh falling snow, the giant rocks, trees and of course Lake Superior. It couldn't have been a more perfect scene. We were wearing giant parkas with hoods and mukluks. So you can't really see our faces in our wedding photos, which I think is kind of hilarious. For people that know us, it's the exact kind of wedding they would expect from us. I think most of them still think we're crazy though!

To check out Beverly's photography of her travels, visit www.bevcedar.com. ■



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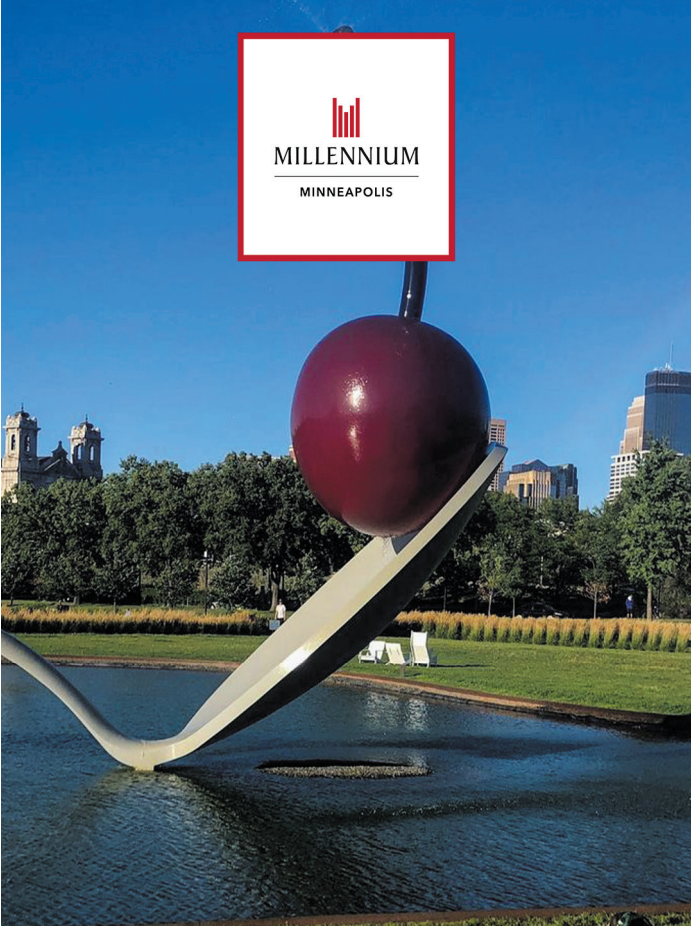
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Captain Ashley Birdsall

BY ISAAC JOHNSON

Captain Ashley Birdsall of the Minnesota National Guard is a leader who makes it easy to follow her. Her outlook on life is contagious and it's no wonder others wish to move about the world as she does. Just to break the ice, CPT Birdsall says, "perseverance, compassion, and determination. Those three things paint the picture of who I am."

Originally from Minnesota, CPT Birdsall grew up in the Iron Range and Duluth area, and went to college in Superior, Wisconsin. Naturally she's played hockey her whole life. After playing in high school and college, she played three seasons with the Minnesota Whitecaps, before signing a contract with the Buffalo Beauts, New York's professional women's hockey team, part of the Premier Hockey Federation.

Her first exposure to the military was when she was 16, when her veteran grandfather passed away. The experience of the twenty-one gun salute and presentation of the flag to her grandmother shed light on the path she knew she wanted to take. "It was a pretty special moment and that was the first initial trigger. I just felt a calling to it." CPT Birdsall joined in 2011 with the intention to serve in leadership roles.

Her leadership ambitions are still set high, yet so far she has reached heights to be proud of. She currently serves as the 34th Infantry Division Headquarters Support Company Commander and the Battalion S3 Training Officer. Leading over 300 personnel, "I've always had more of a stand back, listen and learn approach," says CPT Birdsall. She has that natural leadership ability to set a culture where an individual's growth and development is prioritized while simultaneously inspiring that growth to add to a collective success. "Everyone underneath me are truly the experts, however successful a company commander is, it's a direct reflection of the people underneath them."

The same approach is taken when coaching hockey, "I start out by going down the line and asking each player what is something that they personally want to work on," said CPT Birdsall, "to improve their game, and then I take what they say and that drives what we do in practice."

It's her value of teamwork that makes it all the more easier to face challenges in life, including her own. While her professional hockey career

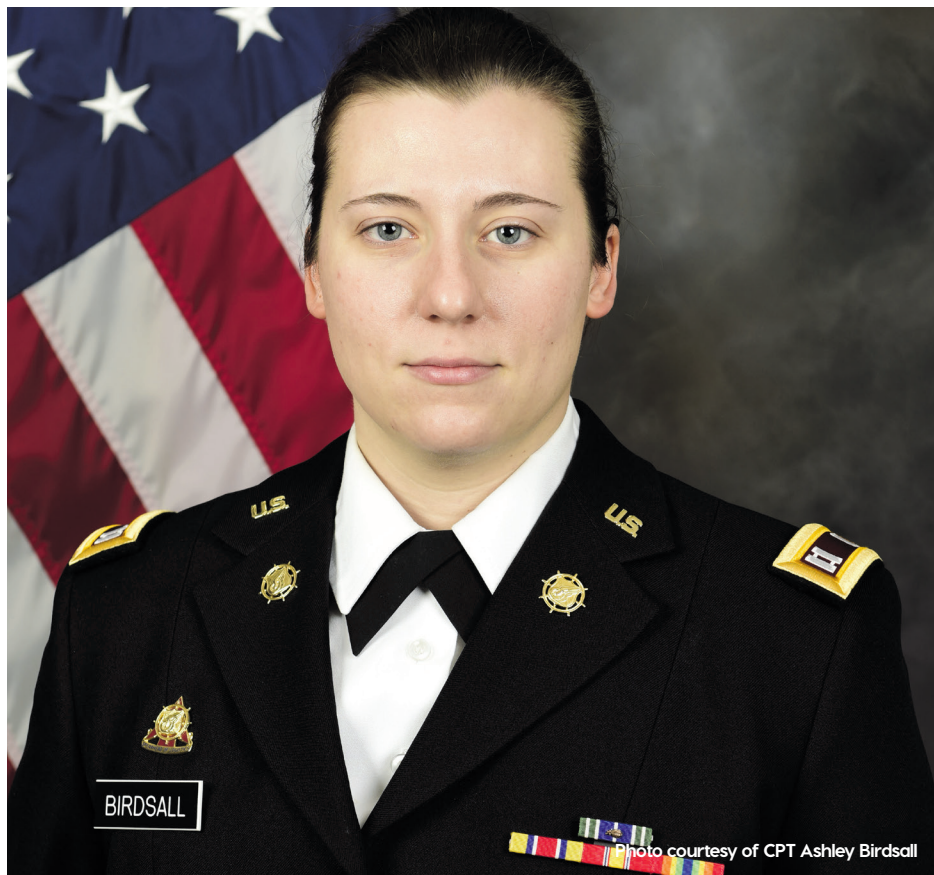


Photo courtesy of CPT Ashley Birdsall

was put on hold due to the pandemic, an injury has made it unclear when she will be able to return to the ice. CPT Birdsall takes the detriment to one of her greatest accomplishments in stride and says, "not to stress about the future, everything's going to pan out the way that it's supposed to happen. I'm a firm believer that everything happens for a reason."

What can only be described as steadiness, with the added wisdom of the need to be flexible, and the skill of adaptability, is what amazes most about CPT Birdsall. She says, "I have learned that not everything that you set out to do is achievable and you will fail and that's okay." She carries this message with her to the people she serves and interacts with every day to comfort them, motivate them, and let them know that they are capable of achieving great things. "It's okay to fail at the end of the day," said CPT Birdsall, "you're always going to continue to

grow, not only your skill sets but your character and your life experiences."

So many experiences have shaped CPT Birdsall including the loss of a good friend and colleague in a helicopter crash. It was a very impactful and pivotal moment in her career and her life, "Life just happens so fast, it can change in a blink of an eye. I learned to really take in the present and the people that you're with."

Clearly that comes with compassion and why there is draw to follow her. When CPT Birdsall started her career she was assigned at Camp Ripley in Minnesota, and that just happened to be where her grandfather is buried. "It's kind of a fairy tale story, every time I go to Camp Ripley," said CPT Birdsall, "I can go visit my grandfather and check in with him and hope I'm making him proud." It's safe to say, more than just her grandfather would be proud. ■

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Pandemic Road Tripping

A Retrospective

BY RANDY STERN | PHOTOS BY RANDY STERN



Roadside near Hudson, WI

As we enter the third year of the pandemic, there are plenty of reminders on how our travel patterns continue to evolve. From mask mandates to proof of negative tests and vaccinations, we have accepted the challenge of traveling during these uncertain times.

At the onset of the pandemic, we felt compelled not to jump on a plane and fly across the ocean. Some of us did, for a purpose. We faced lockdowns, travel and local restrictions everywhere we went. We saw services at the airport, on the plane, at hotels, and restaurants were limited—or rather, eliminated altogether.

When some restrictions were lifted, we either saw a green light to go somewhere or a yellow light to take a lot of precautions when doing so. In the past two years, we rode on a roller coaster

between video conference calls and actually seeing our loved ones over the holidays.

Even in the face of the pandemic, the travel bug never left me.

As I look back at the last couple of years, I found that traveling by automobile was much better for the soul. If you ask me, it was the best way to go anywhere.

Think about the freedom you have when you're in control of your journey. You don't have to hurry up and wait—unless you're in traffic. You are on your own schedule. You can stop whenever you want and not worry about blocking aisles or waiting to use the restroom—unless you're at a convenience store or a gas station.

These past two years were spent trying to

see what it was like to travel in a pandemic by automobile. I have some observations I wanted to share from these road trips.

Back in 2020, you were able to stay in hotels at the onset of the first shutdowns. There were some significant changes you had to deal with. You had to be let into the lobby, rather than just walk in and check into your room. You found that not everything was available to you. There was no in-hotel dining or room service. Some pantries were bare or had a few things available to you. You even saw that some services were held back, such as room cleaning and use of the pool and gym.

If rooms were to be cleaned, they were done so with disinfectants and other agents to ensure that touch points were free from anything contaminated. Hilton and its other hotel brands went as far as to put a seal on the door when you first arrived at your room.

When you were visiting a city or town, you found that not a lot of places were open. The restaurants that remained open asked you to either pick up your food there or have it delivered. At the stores that remained open, you had to take precautions to shop in them. You still do today, to some extent.

As time went on, more services returned to the hotels. More restaurants returned to serving customers inside. More stores returned back to business. It had been a difficult past two years.

To show you the contrast, I spent a night out in Chippewa Falls, WI, in June of 2020 in a new Volkswagen Passat. I found that there were no services available at the hotel. You only had take-out options by the hotel. If you wanted something for your room, the nearby Kwik Trip sufficed for the night.

When I drove up to Bemidji a month later in a Volkswagen Tiguan, it became more hit or miss when it came to dining and shopping. I noticed that some restaurants downtown had outdoor dining only—from what I saw. Luckily, the res-



Club David, Sioux Falls SD



Grand Marais, MN



Roadside along US Hwy 71 near Wadena, MN

restaurant attached to the hotel I stayed at was open. I stuck around the area of the hotel by the lake without knowing what would be open or not.

When we got into 2021, there seemed to be a settled pattern in terms of restrictions. You can go in with a mask or not, depending on what state you're visiting—or what part of Minnesota you were traveling in. On a road trip I took into Sioux Falls, South Dakota last March in a new Volkswagen Arteon, I saw that no one was wearing any masks everywhere I went—except for restaurant and store staff, of course.

An interesting note, when I visited Vermillion—the home of the University of South Dakota—I stopped in a couple of places and noticed more mask compliance than in Sioux Falls.

A couple of weeks later, I drove up to International Falls and Grand Marais—both day trips out of the Duluth area. There was mask compliance in most places. At least you could assume they were following Minnesota's guidelines.

There was also something I observed on my road trips during this pandemic: Closures. Not just restaurants and stores. I was surprised how many Starbucks locations were closed on my travels. One such location was in Wausau, Wisconsin. It is a location that I usually stop at after a visit to Road America in Elkhart Lake. That really surprised me a lot. Should I have been surprised given how much of a challenge businesses had to keep the doors open during these two years?

One thing I keep on coming back to in my travels is how much this state and region continues to be a way to observe how everyone else lives outside of your own routine. You also get to see more of our land by automobile. It is the people you meet, the places you encounter, the change in scenery, and the memories you bring home with you.

That is why I enjoy taking road trips. There is nothing like bringing home the experience of the journey and the destination. ■



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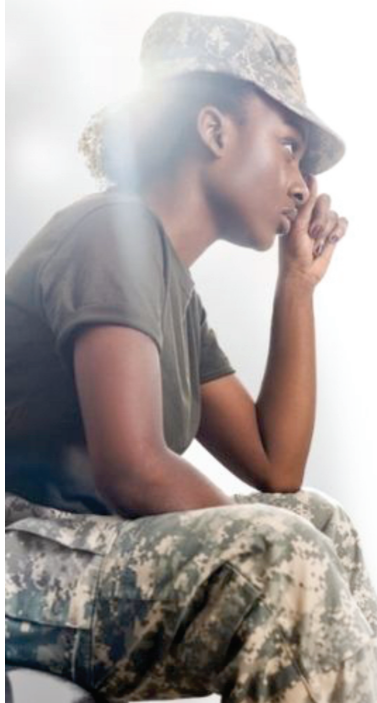
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Traveling While Trans

BY ELLEN KRUG

For the longest time, I believed there was an imaginary Tupperware-tight line that separated the Twin Cities LGBTQ bubble from the rest of Minnesota.

Thus, if you headed west on Interstate 94, you would find that line midway between Maple Grove and Monticello—on one side, queer folks were relatively safe, inhabiting a world where two dads pushing a baby carriage on the Stone Arch Bridge was a reason to pause and coo.

On the other side of that line things at best were inhospitable, with intolerant humans who might visibly react to anyone who doesn't pass as straight or cisgender. Worst case, things could go sideways quickly with soul-crushing stares, verbal assaults, and maybe even the physical kind.

For years, when I traveled to greater Minnesota, I steeled myself. After all, for someone like me, a transwoman with a way-too-masculine voice, heading beyond the Twin Cities metro meant a certain degree of anxiety and the need for far more situational awareness. If I was pumping gas in Albany and someone pulled up to the pump opposite me, you could be certain that I'd refrain from saying hello or chiming in about the Twins and their miserable pitching.

There's too much risk out here, I would think. It's darn easy for anyone to figure out that I'm trans, and god knows what that will bring.

Yep, I told myself—and others—all of that.

And then I moved to greater Minnesota, beyond the bubble. A little more than a year ago, I bought a house in Victoria, an enclave of 12,000 that is literally at the edge of the prairie. I can see a farm (and past that, there are gravel roads with many farms) from my bedroom window. The thirty-five miles it takes to get to Victoria from downtown Minneapolis is like traveling from one civilization to another.

If you're not familiar with Victoria, it's 96 percent white, with a whole lot of well off and ostensibly (we queer people understand that word oh so well, don't we?) straight, cisgender humans. In fact, the town's logo—to the consternation of some, including me—includes the image of a church, St. Victoria's, from which the town took its name.

My larger neighborhood consists of two-story family homes, and much to my delight—because the sound of laughter and giggles so warms my heart—on sun-draped summer days, I can see and hear children running from yard-to-yard, playing games and just being kids.

That stuff is humanity at its very best, filled with promise and hope, innocence abounding.

My street, which ends in a dead-end circle, is comprised of smaller

one-story “villa” homes with the owner's bedroom on the main floor. Most of my neighbors are retirees—many are in their seventies—seeking to make the best out of what time is left.

I had some angst about moving here, but I so loved the area, with its miles of bike trails and woods and lakes, and I steeled myself to be brave. It turns out that the fretting was for naught—without exception, my neighbors are charming and kind, and they appear to not only accept me, but they seem to even like me. At least it would appear that way with me being elected HOA board president. (Although, some readers familiar with HOAs might view that as a form of punishment...)

I've experienced acceptance in other ways, too. I've been volunteering in the community, getting to know people, where I'm the only out transgender person for miles around. Time and again, people are friendly and welcoming and not once have I been made to feel uncomfortable. Yes, sometimes I get “the look” that reflexively occurs when people react to my voice/appearance incongruity, but really, that happens within the Bubble too.

My experience out here has gotten me thinking that it's all too easy to draw lines between “us” and “them,” between where we “belong” or don't, and that certainly we ought to be working to erase lines altogether. I'm thinking that “traveling while trans” is too much of an isolating phrase, something that I should discard entirely.

The kicker came as I was walking my golden retriever Jack (a whole other story). I had driven by the two-story family home around the corner a hundred times and not noticed, but on my dog walk, I spotted it: a sign in the front yard of one of those family houses that said, “All are Welcome.” The very next line: “Love is Love,” with an attendant rainbow. Oh my god. In fricking Victoria.

A couple weeks ago, Jack and I were out on another walk. The man of that house was shoveling snow, and as I pointed to the sign, I yelled to him, “Thank you!”

He paused and yelled back, “Of course!”

As I said, oh my god. We humans are far better than anyone thinks.

I am committed to helping the world understand this. ■

*Ellen (Ellie) Krug, the author of *Getting to Ellen: A Memoir about Love, Honesty and Gender Change*, speaks and trains on diversity and inclusion topics; visit www.elliekrug.com where you can also sign-up for her monthly 9000+ recipient e-newsletter, *The Ripple*. She welcomes your comments at elliekrug@gmail.com.*

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